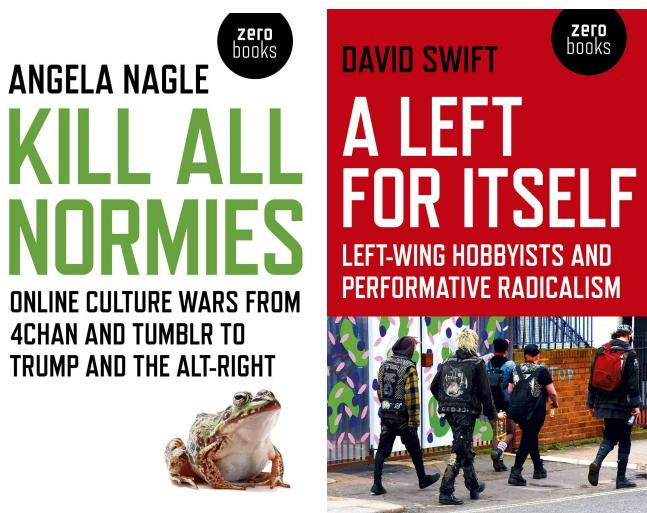


Creative Making: Big Data, The Self and Social Platforms

Project context - The Online Culture Wars

In the last few decades there has been an uprising of political culture wars on the internet. One of the many contributions to these hidden wars have been political bots that reside on social media sites usually pushing sided agendas framed as real human beings, sometimes these bots can be framed as 'The Russian bots' which are believed (not proven) to be state sponsored bots that link back the official russian government.

Recently I have been reading books surrounding these wars such as 'Kill all normies' by Angela Nagle who details the left who reside mostly on tumblr & twitter and the alt-right on sites such as 4chan and reddit. I thought an interesting and internet culture related topic would be to create a bot that conceptually surrounds these different political narratives.



Research

The Alt-right, Internet memes & bots

The alt-right, an abbreviation for alternative right, arose online as a far right white nationalist movement, originating in the United States in the early 2010's. The members of this political movement reject mainstream conservative views, their ideals are more extreme and centres around white nationalism, anti-feminism & anti-LGBTQ+. Due to



this movement being predominantly internet based, the internet and social media has acted as a huge role in the influx and involvement of this group. As mentioned before, 4chan / 8chan are the sites that this group resides on, memes and edgy internet culture are gateways to the radicalisation of the right. To someone completely culturally oblivious to far right memes, the jokes probably can just be seen as edgy or politically incorrect but not something that would initiate domestic terrorist attacks, however, the inside jokes that usually reference harmless pop culture items (films, video games, meme characters) are used to disguise extremely harmful ideals as simply ironic internet jokes. For example the 'Pepe The Frog' character was innocently created by Matt Furie a cartoonist in 2005, following its popularity on social media platforms Myspace & 4chan in 2008, it was adopted by the alt-right in the 2010's styled as a Adolf Hitler, Donald Trump and other crude symbols.

The alt-right also has a history of bot usage on social media sites, in order to sway votes and opinions in a far right direction. MicroMagicJingleTM also known as the "Trumppbot overlord", is a voluminous tweeter through the use of multiple twitter bots, his purpose is to make hashtags trend. The hashtags are extremely abrasive some past examples being #hillarygropedme, #cruzsexscandal and #R***refugees. Micro works behind an extremely secure VPN so his identity is hidden But when contacted by Buzzfeed, he conducted an interview and revealed himself to be a 30-year old software developer from Utah, USA stating he guards his identity due to the 'uniformed' discourse in the media and US government regarding Russian influence and botting.

So we can see the alt-right is a perfect example of a subculture residing on the online world and using devices of data, meme culture, social media and the internet as a whole to expand their ideologies. Just to conclude, the alt right can't be misconstrued as edgy teenage male trolls, extremely horrific acts have taken place since the start of this movement for instance, Dylann Roof committing the Charleston church shooting. Tech companies are proceeding to crack down on extremist ideals to cut off the communication of this group.

Liberals & the culture war

Liberals / Liberalism are obviously terms formed way before internet culture wars, most western left wing people would consider themselves to be liberals. Liberals in modern terms can be defined as individualists who are socially progressive (pro individual rights, civil liberties, democracy, LGBTQ+) and are pro capitalism.

When it comes to culture wars, liberals tend not to use internet 'things' such as bots, memes, and hacking in a malicious way. Their role in these arising internet culture wars range from angry Tiktoks to get people to vote for Biden with the repeated tagline "he's not perfect but at least he's not Trump" to Twitter teens being



more concerned about celebrity morality than actual progressive laws being passed to help the oppressed.

Online liberals are often critiqued on both ends of the spectrum for being rather surface level when it comes to their progressiveness and engaging in harmful approaches such as identity politics. An example being the social media clash between the far left and liberals during the 2020 US presidential election when liberals were praising Kamala Harris for being the first woman of colour with a presidential role, however when Harris was the senator of California, she oversaw 1,900 cannabis related convictions and had a helping hand in the mass incarceration of black americans for a drug that has since been legalised in the state of California and even bragged about using it illegally herself. This is an example of liberals being more engaged in the identity of people put in the position of power that can continue enhancing an oppressive system rather than pushing towards fixing the systems at hand or voting for candidates who would. David Swift an author specialising on the contemporary left wrote his book "A Left for Itself: Left-wing Hobbyists and Performative Radicalism" addressing these issues as such.

The socialist and online comrades, hacktivism & censorship

Socialism and Communism are left wing philosophies that have a shared belief based on fair distribution of wealth among citizens and public ownership of the means of production. They are on the far left of the political spectrum usually defined as the umbrella term 'leftist'. There has been a current rising of the online millennial & zoomer leftist, maybe due to the increasing social and economic disparities in the world or the billionaire turned twitter celebrity Elon Musk granting access to the pointless theatrics of the "wealth hoarders" or perhaps it's the current climate issues that are being exacerbated by the greed of billionaire corporations. Whatever the reason is, you can see leftist in the clones quote tweeting politicians, corporations and even landlords with the bold hammer and sickle emoji in their bio.

When it comes to the internet culture wars, leftist have a lengthy history with hacktivism to contribute to their part. Anonymous is a hacker group founded in 2003 and has been described as a internet based, non-extremist, socialist society that looks for answers to questions that are unanswered. Before the alt-right took over identity-free site 4chan, the original members used the site to talk about anarchy, oppression and the state of things and had built a name for themselves on the platform. They have gone onto



commit many acts of activist hacking that it would be extremely lengthy if i talked about each one but to condense some of the noble events; hacking the finnish site Habbo and blocking access after the site had revealed to be racially profiling users, hacked the church of scientology due the churches involved of exploiting members, temporarily brought down paypal, visas and mastercards website as the companies placed a role in the take down of WikiLeaks and even made a threatening comeback during the 2020 presidential election towards Donald Trump. Anonymous is not a specific group of people but an ideology of taking censorship and surveillance away and has been growing amongst socialist hackers since.

The dirtbag left have also played their part in the internet culture wars through contribution to leftist comedy and commentary. They can be defined as the 'anti-woke left' who use more subversive vulgarity which is something more common with the far right, but these new age dirtbag leftist feel as the softness of the left isn't getting their points across and can be classed as 'edgy' leftist but have been critiqued as dirtbag leftism can be seen as people being economically progressives but not socially by making crude jokes towards marginalised groups in order to 'transfer' people from the alt-right. There are various popular dirtbag left podcasts such as Red Scare & ChapoTrapHouse. They have been involved in various internet memes such as Sailor Socialism who is also known as Dasha Nekrasova one of the hosts of the Red Scare podcast who went viral as a meme when interviewed by a Infowars reporter at Bernie Sanders rally.

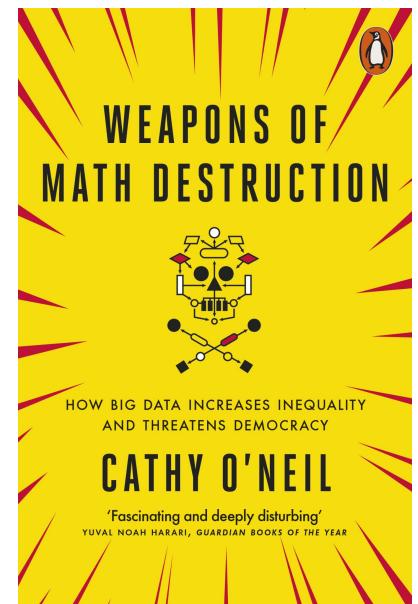


Relevance to big data & critical data practice

Big data is extremely large data sets that are analysed computability to reveal patterns, trends, and more that usually relate to human behaviour. Massive cooperation such as Google & Facebook use big data to make decisions within the company. There has been an increase in the amount of companies creating big data and the data sets becoming bigger and bigger with small companies selling their customer data to larger ones, expanding the fear of a hyper surveilled and recorded internet that data one day becoming completely centralised.

There are many rational fears of big data in regards to the internet culture wars such as:

- **The increase of online political 'Echo chambers'** - Constant surveillance of internet usage and forceful algorithms made from big data are causing a lot of people to become stuck in political echo chambers. echo chambers can be described as an



environment where a person encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own, causing political homophily in niche internet circles. This is dangerous as many echo chambers keep people stuck on online radicalised places and often forces them down an alt-right pipeline.

- **Demonetisation and censorship of certain political beliefs** - Many content based platforms like youtube and tiktok use big data and algorithms to make sure that visibility as well as profitable earning are restricted when they go against their companies belief.
- **“Personal scores” being reduced due to being politically active online** - it is often believed that in the future ‘value’ scores will be kept on us based on big data collection from our internet usage so depending on what a person's political views are these scores could increase or decrease and could be used by employers in the future.
- **Race and class discrimination based on big data** - what many people on the left fight against like racial discrimination and oppressive class systems are now being amplified with the use of big data. Credit scores cause unemployment and lack of housing due to this surveillance and mass recording of our finances. Some companies won't provide jobs without a good credit score and landlords unwilling to accept tenants with low scores just expands class disparities with already struggling people. Big data can also easily & accurately guess your race through the internet content you consume, it's been proven companies are using this to discriminate against certain groups e.g. Tiktok being revealed to push black people at the bottom of their algorithm causing lack of exposure.

So as we can see big data is causing a lot of ethical issues and that is currently trying to be tackled with the use of critical data practice. Critical data practice is the act of critising how we think about , value, interact with or experience data and applying certain practices. Critical data studies is currently ongoing to conduct frameworks, proposals, questions, and manifestos in order to ethically conduct data collection. some conclusions and practices from critical data studies:

- **Acknowledging data is never raw** - all data is a result of contested social practices and is influenced by the wanted outcome of the specific project.
- **Acknowledging data is not as neutral as it is believed to be** - These “neutral” algorithms are being created by humans that use big data with biases.
- **Acknowledging big data does mean better** - in some circumstances the bigger the data set the harder to complete needed tasks e.g. finding a potential terrorist in a sea of data and letting them slip through the net.

Ideas

1. Creating my own “echo chamber” using a discord bot. As mentioned before, echo chambers are online homophily environments. I thought an interesting idea would be to create a discord server that through the use of a bot automatically shares

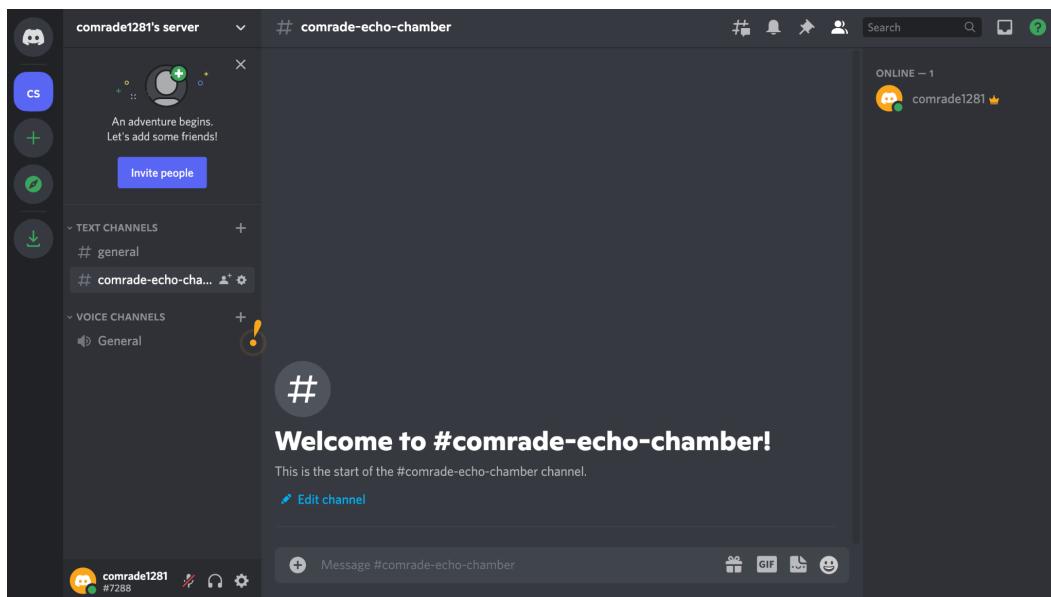


different internet political figures' tweets and content to create my own mini echo chamber.

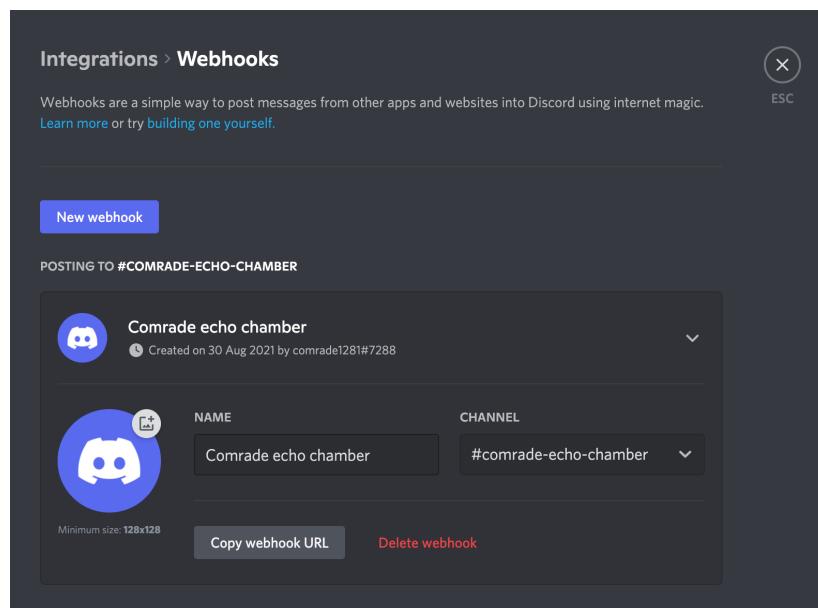
2. Different 'Political bots' from different internet culture war narratives that auto reply and interact with one another.

Bot Development

1. I made a discord and a new text channel called 'comrade-echo-chamber'.



2. Then I went to the integration settings of the text channel in order to make a webhook, webhooks are used to post messages from other apps.



3. I used ifttt, which is a service that allows a user to program a response to events on other applications.

The image shows the IFTTT website. At the top, there are navigation links: 'Get started guide', 'My Apps', 'Explore', 'Developers', 'Create', and a 'Create your own' button. Below this, a banner says 'Start connecting your world.' and 'Go beyond if this then that with queries, conditional logic, multiple actions, and more! Start free trial'. A central graphic features a tree-like network of various app icons (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Spotify, Hue) connected by colored lines. A 'Get more' button is at the bottom of the network. To the right, it says 'You're using 0 of 3 Applets' and shows two main sections: 'If This' (black background) and 'Then That' (grey background), each with an 'Add' button.

4. I used the ifttt feature that sends the retweets of a specific twitter user to a discord server and typed in the usernames of leftift twitter users.

This screenshot shows the 'Complete trigger fields' section for a Twitter trigger. It features a large Twitter bird icon. The title is 'New tweet by a specific user'. Below it, a note says 'This Trigger fires every time the Twitter user you specify tweets.' A 'Username to watch' input field contains 'sleepisocialist'. A large blue 'Create trigger' button is at the bottom.

This screenshot shows the 'Make a web request' section. It features a large white chain icon. The title is 'Make a web request'. Below it, a 'URL' input field contains the following webhook URL: `https://discord.com/api/webhooks/881759235443154946/q3mWbyitFLfDQUQR3ojBNz3wWRtxgj3fIRumDfishXi9OhSw67XZv7qt3OIFDS7I2x93`. A note at the bottom says 'Surround any text with <<< and >>> to escape the content. Surround any text with <<< and >>> to escape the content. See [FAQ](#) if using an IPv6 URL.' A small 'Add ingredient' button is also visible.

- Then added more twitter accounts.

My Applets

Q
Filter

All (3)
Created by me (3)
[View archive](#)

You have 0 available Applets. Upgrade to Pro for unlimited Applets. [Learn more](#)

If New tweet by specific user @ProudSocialist, then Make a web request

by shardaidawk

Connected

1

If New tweet by specific user @the_antifada, then Make a web request

by shardaidawk

Connected

1

If New tweet by specific user @sleepisocialist, then Make a web request

by shardaidawk

Connected

1

[Upgrade](#)

- I did run into some technical difficulties, which I found was due to too many requests being made so in order to fix that I tried to change the server.

!
Applet failed
Aug 30 - 1:51 PM

If New tweet by specific user @ProudSocialist, then Make a web request

Action failure message: Too many requests to this host.

Twitter

New tweet by a specific user

Expand for details

Webhooks

Make a web request

Expand for details

!
Applet failed
Aug 30 - 12:51 PM

If New tweet by specific user @ProudSocialist, then Make a web request

Action failure message: Your server returned a 400. Unable to make web request to https://discord.com/api/webhooks/881759235443154946/q3mWbyitFLfDQ UQR3ojBNz3wWRtxgj3flRumDishXl9OhSw67XZv7qt3OIFD\$712x93

Final outcome

I managed to create a bot that automatically tweets from a certain political narrative. To test if the bot worked I put my on twitter in ifttt and retweeted a post. After i i reselied the bot was functioning I had to wait for tweets to roll in thus creating my 'echo chamber'

My reflection on the project is that I wished I had created a more complex bot but was restricted with technical difficulties and since my project context was surrounding the internet culture wars topic, this felt like the most relevant bot to complete.

The screenshot shows a Discord channel interface. The channel is named '#comrade-echo-chamber'. The message is from a bot account named 'Comrade echo chamber' (@ComradeEchoChamber). The message content is:

Black Socialists in America (@BlackSocialists)
As we talk "organizing" or unionizing, let's:
1) Question the existence of our industries.
2) Assess community needs.
3) Define organizing goals.
Not all jobs need to exist for our wellbeing and happiness, needs must decide production, and we must aim for full worker control.

Retweets: 415 Likes: 1654

Twitter • Today at 14:53

Applet ran
Aug 30 - 2:54 PM



Tweet

You tweeted: RT @BlackSocialists: As we talk "organizing" or unionizing, let's:
1) Question the existence of our industries. 2) Assess community needs. 3)
Define organizing goals. Not all jobs need to exist for our wellbeing and
happiness, needs must decide production, and we must aim for full worker
control.



Twitter
New tweet by you
o Expand for details
Webhooks
Make a web request
o Expand for details